SAN CLEMENTE ISLAND RANGE COMPLEX
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT (EIS)

San Clemente Island Range Complex Update

SAN CLEMENTE LOGGERHEAD SHRIKE NUMBERS ON THE INCREASE

Integrated approach and program innovations show encouraging results

The San Clemente loggerhead shrike, a federally listed endangered species, is responding well to the Navy's program aimed at re-establishing the population to viable numbers. This distinct subspecies is about the size of a robin with a white underbelly, gray top, and black "burglar's mask" across its eyes and is found in the wild only on San Clemente Island. While the wild shrike numbers had plummeted to a low of 7 to 13 birds in the mid-1990s, they are beginning to recover. At the last count, conducted at the end of the 2000 breeding season, a rebounding population of more than 70 loggerhead shrikes was recorded. While this number will be compromised by natural deaths over the winter months, it is estimated that the new breeding season in 2001 should see at least 22 birds, a significant increase from the recent years.

The turnaround is attributable largely to the Navy's integrated approach comprised of several individual programs which are carried out in association with the Zoological Society of San Diego (ZSSD), Institute for Wildlife Studies (IWS) and the Point Reyes Bird Observatory. The captive breeding program, which is conducted in collaboration with ZSSD, started in 1991 and has since overcome several setbacks to become more effective. The primary goal of the program is to breed and rearthe birds within the security of a captive environment during the initial stages of their life span. Juvenile shrikes are then released from captivity into the wild.Although they are vulnerable as juveniles, they are capable of hunting and flying.

Shrikes released during the first few years of the program had low survival rates, revealing the naiveté of captive reared birds. However, innovations in the program, such as the introduction of techniques to enhance the shrikes' prey-catching abilities, have led to higher success rates. The program has also benefited greatly from its collaboration with the IWS through the development and implementation of release techniques that allow for successful re-introduction of birds in the wild. Currently, the Navy is experimenting with four different release techniques: release of a "single captive female" to a single wild male, release of a bonded "captive pairs" and release of a "family units," whereby bonds and ties are pre-established while the birds are in captivity. They are then released into the wild to either breed as couples or coexist as whole families. These experiments have yielded mixed results. Tallies at the end of the 2000 breeding season in August showed that of the 10 adults released as bonded pairs none bred successfully in the wild. However, the four family group releases met with better success. Three of these groups are currently rearing young. Of particular note, this year the program witnessed a milestone with a captive reared bird released as a juvenile in 1999 that successfully produced three wild offspring. Since the end of breeding season, the Navy's efforts have been directed towards the supplemental feeding of released birds, monitoring birds on the island, continued predator control, and identifying and enhancing release sites for 2001.

Some of the other measures adopted by the Navy to boost the depleted shrike population include predator control and habitat restoration. Predator control measures, conducted in collaboration with IWS, aim at eliminating impacts on shrikes by non-native wildlife and native animals, such as the San Clemente Island fox. Non-lethal approaches have been taken to control native predators which include trapping and holding, nest disruption, and resource partitioning for ravens, hawks, and kestrels.

Except for feral cats and rats (non natives to San Clemente Island), lethal control is used only in cases of imminent threat to shrikes at vulnerable periods of the breeding cycle.

With regards to the San Clemente Island fox, which is classified by California Department of Fish and Game as a threatened species, the Navy is implementing a three-pronged strategy of trapping and holding foxes during the shrike breeding season, installing an electric fence system around key shrike habitats, and using shock collar systems. The trap-and-hold plan is a sound conservation strategy that allows fledging and newly released shrikes to adapt to the wild, while at the same time preserving the state-protected fox. To further deter foxes from entering shrike territory the Navy installed a simple electrical system which delivers a mild electrical charge to a fox approaching a nesting area. If the fox continues towards the nest, it will continue to receive shocks through a shock collar. Shock collars are used only on foxes which have demonstrated repeated nest intrusions and are removed from the foxes after all shrike nestlings leave the nest and become independent.

Shrike habitat augmentation is being implemented to propagate indigenous plant species and increase the abundance of species that are important components of high quality shrike territories. Large areas of native plant species had been depleted by a once burgeoning, non-native goat population, adversely affecting shrike nesting sites. These plants have shown remarkable recovery since the Navy removed the goats in the early 1990s, creating a more favorable environment for recovery of the endangered shrike.

All of these measures have gone a long way towards restoring an ecosystem conducive for the survival of the shrike. In 1999 the Navy spent $2.3 million in trying to save the bird through captive breeding, electronically guarding nests, and eliminating non-native predators. As the numbers show, these efforts are now paying off for the shrike, and the Navy's efforts are continuing unabated.

The Draft EIS proposed for release in Fall 2000 has been delayed for several months to permit additional analysis. The anticipated release will now be Spring 2001. For more information on San Clemente Island you may use the San Clemente Island website - http://www.scisland.org/ or the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) webpage - www.cnbsd.navy.mil/facility/sci.htm.

If you wish to be added to the San Clemente Island Range Complex EIS mailing list you may use the EIS web site or you may write or fax your address information to:

San Clemente Island Environmental Impact Statement Office
Attention: Carrie Anne Downey
Naval Air Station, North Island, Environmental Department
Building 3
P.O. Box 357088
San Diego, CA 92135-7088
Or FAX to (619) 545-3489

Please Note: The previous San Clemente Island Range Complex Update had a mistype in the webpage address for the San Clemente Island Range Complex EIS. We apologize for any inconvenience it may have caused you. The correct web address is:
www.cnbsd.navy.mil/facility/sci.htm